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ABSTRACT

Middle school students can become fascinated with literature if they have a choice in selecting which trade book to read and the means of revealing comprehension. One student teacher (ST) developed a bulletin board to stimulate learner interest in reading for her sixth grade students. "Read and Digest" was the heading, with four illustrations showing a student reading, travel scenes, historical figures, and four new book jackets which overlapped. Using the book "Cassie Binegar" (Patricia MacLachlan), the ST discussed the bulletin board with the class and told related trade book content for each illustration. The ST mentioned that she would like to use a seminar method to discuss the book in depth, and she explained this method to the four students who had volunteered to read the book. The four students, when asked if they had enjoyed the book, responded in the affirmative. They were enthusiastic and ready to share and analyze ideas contained in the book. The open discussion between the ST and the students used brainstorming effectively--33 responses were provided by learners as to how the heroine of the novel might have resolved her feelings about the house her family lived in. The group of students finished off their discussion by writing a "diamante." (NKA)

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SEMINAR METHODS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERATURE

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Middle school pupils can become very fascinated with literature if they have a choice in selecting which trade book to read and the means of revealing comprehension. A sixth grade student teacher (ST) supervised by the writer developed a carefully constructed bulletin board to stimulate learner interest in reading. The caption read " READ AND DIGEST' with four pictures on the bulletin board showing a pupil reading, travel pictures in one scene, historical figures in another, and four new book jackets which overlapped. The ST discussed the bulletin board with learners and told related trade book content for each of the illustrations on the bulletin board. Thus for the travel scenes, the ST held up the trade book "Cassie Binegar" by Patricia Mac Lachlan (published by Harper Collins, 1982) and stressed to the entire class a few major ideas contained in the book. There were four copies of this book available for reading. Four pupils volunteered to read this book. The ST mentioned that she would like to use a seminar method to discuss in depth the contents of one of the trade books introduced. The seminar method was explained to learners. The same four pupils wanted to experience the seminar method in discussing the contents of "Caddie Binegar."

After the pupils had completed reading this book, they were seated in a circle together with the ST. During this time, the cooperating teacher (CT) worked with and supervised other middle school pupils in the classroom who were also reading or had completed reading a trade book which they had chosen. The ST first attempted to determine how well learners had enjoyed reading "Cassie Binegar." She believed that learners should like the contents of what had been read. Enjoyment of literature then becomes a major objective of instruction. Too frequently, the ST felt that pupils had to read what others had chosen for them. She believed strongly that learners should choose which trade book to read

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as well as how to be evaluated. Sometimes pupils should read trade books without being evaluated unless learners wished to have some type of appraisal and select the means of evaluation.

When pupils responded to the question of how well they had liked the trade book read, they were very enthusiastic and were ready to discuss its contents. They had so much to discuss and share. With the revealed enthusiasm, Pupils showed their attitudes toward the trade book. The attitudes were positive indeed. Each of the four pupils wanted to share and analyze ideas contained in the book.

Cassie was nit satisfied with the house her family had by the sea. Pupils in the seminar group discussed reasons for the dislike. Literal interpretation was involved in discussing each reason. This was followed by brain storming what Cassie might have done to overcome her feelings. During brain storming, pupils were not to make value judgments on responses given. Learners were also not to duplicate on each brain stormed reason. The ST numbered and wrote responses given by pupils. A key goal in brain storming was to respect the thinking of others. Thirty three responses were provided by learners as to how Cassie might have handled her feelings about the house she lived in. Pupils found it very difficult to come up with additional responses after the first twenty had been given. A major feeling of the group was that Cassie should adjust to the house she presently lives. At the same time, the house should be made as comfortable and tidy as possible.

Pupils showed much interest in Cassie not liking how her parents earned a living. Cassie's parents earned a living by and through fishing. One seminar pupil talked abut liking to go fishing. The other three wondered if liking to fish was different from working at fishing as a livelihood. All agreed that providing food for the consumer was important.

Each seminar pupil believed that any job has its likes an dislikes. They believed that there are advantages and disadvantages in jobs that people work at.

Pupils were asked what they would like to experience in a job or profession. The top three wants were the following;

1. satisfaction in the kind of work performed.

2. work completed should benefit society.

3. adequate pay received so that necessities and a few luxuries of life could be purchased.

The ST marveled that seminar members did not prize a wealthy life style more highly when choosing one's life work. When asked in a discussion how Cassie should resolve dislike for her parent's occupation, pupils again tended to believe that she must accept life as it is. They also felt that Cassie can change to a different occupation as an adult.

Toward the end of the trade book, Cassie sees her house through the eyes of Margaret Mary who assisted the former in appreciating that which is at the present time. A lively discussion centered on what can and what cannot be accepted. Learners related personal experiences on what they did and did not accept due to an inability to do so. One pupil mentioned that it was difficult to accept the odors of butchering a hog on the farm. Another had never experience butchering a hog, but believed she could not watch this kind of a sight due to its being inhumane. She could relate very well to Cassie not being able too accept the odors of fish in the home setting. Learners tended to realize that human beings have problems. Some have major problems whereas others face numerous smaller problems in life.

Margaret Mary's house was clean and tidy. Cassie patterned her thinking in terms of Margaret Mary's life. A long debate followed as to how much cleanliness should be emphasized in a house. The writer and supervisor of the ST brought into the elaboration a family he knew in which all family members (the parents and two children) had to take off their shoes each time thy came in from the outdoors. The inside of the house was extremely immaculate. There was a place for everything and seemingly it was in its proper place. Seminar members were not certain they would like to live in a house where rules were extremely strict for keeping a house clean and superbly orderly. One pupil stated that a house is to love and enjoy. If one has to worry continuously about appearance in the home, it would take out a lot of the joy of living.

Pupils had studied writing diamantes a few weeks ago and wished to write one with all four committee members involved. The following diamante resulted;

HOUSES
FRIENDLY, COMFORTABLE
CLEANING, SCRUBBING, TIDYING
BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, ATTRACTION, JOY
LEARNING, WORKING, ENJOYING
PATIENT, COOPERATIVE
SCHOOL

In Summary

Pupils seemingly liked the seminar method in discussing content pertaining to the trade book CASSIE BINEGAR. Each participant contributed in an optimal manner and yet respected the contributions of others. Time on task was very important to participants. Learners stayed on the topic being discussed even though an open ended approach was definitely involves in that pupils determined sequence in ongoing experiences. Pupils were very interested in that Margaret Mary had assisted Cassie to appreciate the home she lived in. Seminar members examined their own attitudes toward others and the cultures they live in. An increased desire to do more reading of trade books was a definite end result. Parents of seminar participants commented during parent-teacher conferences the interests pupils developed in reading when a stimulating environment for learning is in evidence.